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ABSTRACT

The emergence, development to the present, and future trends of teacher centers in Great Britain are examined. The effects of political decisions, educational expenditure, the Plowden Report, curriculum review, social crises, and other factors on the ways in which teacher centers were organized and have changed are discussed. Problems and possible future directions of British teacher centers are related to the U.S. experience and those of Australia and New Zealand. Dangers to the continued autonomous development of centers are investigated, including social pressure for "accountability," the role of colleges of education, federal government control, diminishing student populations, use of para-professionals, and the role of the center wardens (leaders). (MJB)

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The British Teachers Centre

Teachers centres in England and Wales arose from complex origins in the early 1960s in which public opinion, curriculum and politics were inextricably intermeshed.

Political decisions, such as British entry into the European Economic Community brought concern over the quality of language teaching and the need for metrication together with other curriculum innovations. National anxieties were publicly expressed about possible deterioration in reading and other basic skills, the threat of technological competition from other nations, the poor behaviour of the economy and failure to satisfy the expectations of parents and employers.

Exponential increases in educational expenditure continued unquestioned throughout the 1960s thus providing more than adequate funding for teachers centres. A 'teacher quota' designed to discourage cities from taking more than their fair share of teachers was informally relaxed when teachers staff were being appointed.

The emergence of large comprehensives, middle schools and a post-Plowden expansion of nursery education prompted curriculum experiment and rethinking in all phases of the system.

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New curriculum demanded for the raising of the school leaving age in 1973 led to a review of the entire secondary school curriculum from 11+, some LEAs forming consortia and setting up curriculum development or teachers centres for that purpose. A covert curriculum counter-reformation also proceeded unnoticed but serviced by centres which met the demands of teachers.

Local secondary school 'profile' examinations for 16 year olds, prepared, continuously assessed, moderated by teachers stimulated professional confidence. Campaigning trends towards unstreaming in the primary school and the mixed ability teaching found in 40% of secondary schools by 1973 joined with moves towards the integrated day in primary or integrated studies in secondary schools. New hybrid subjects such as social studies, stimulating curriculum development activity at teachers centres, also emerged.

The influential Plowden Report praised the British informal classroom movement and its associated curriculum innovation. After all, the ideology of open education demanded that teachers chose their own curriculum. For this reason and because primary schools were of small size, primary teachers formed the largest and most active network of membership at teachers centres, especially in Nuffield mathematics, workshops, creative art, guitar and other 'informal' classroom programmes.

In British urban schools there was a staffing, curriculum and social control crisis throughout the 1960s. Urban curriculum development was promoted in schemes of positive discrimination in the city systems arising from the Plowden Report recommendations and influenced by the American example. Generous additional funds allowed urban schools to experiment with curriculum innovation, especially in educational technology and audio visual aids. There was a major expansion of para professional staffing in all schools. These trends again made for teachers centre growth. In the cities many young teachers felt they were insufficiently prepared for the urban classroom by their college courses. Colleges of education were criticised for neglecting the teaching of reading or the realities of the multi cultural, urban classroom. Unfortunately the colleges had been under severe pressure in expanding their intakes and designing academic courses which would help to secure graduate recognition for the teaching profession. Courses had become correspondingly unrealistic in terms of the 'real world of the classroom'. Crash programmes of professional 'induction' support at teachers centres were needed for the waves of urban young teachers arriving annually. For high staff turnover and teacher exodus from the cities meant that a system, say with 20,000 teachers, would lose up to 2,500 each year.

Against a context of urban classroom crisis it was not surprising that, despite a public rhetoric favourable to curriculum innovation, the substance was not always present. Cargo-cult, a response to professional panic, was commonly found. Both educational realism and a siege psychology were behind a curriculum counter-reformation prompting teachers to visit centres to retrieve lost or unfashionable skills. There was a resurgence of country dancing, Christmas decorations, phonics, 'checking up' maths courses, and demands for 'curriculum guidelines'. Experienced and young teachers in responding to the 'role diffusion' or 'extended professionalisation' identified by educational sociologists in looking at their profession, sought to compensate by acquiring 'hard' skills at short courses at teachers centres.

For teachers themselves many urban centres offered pastoral support, professional tutors, self-help groups or even psychiatric assistance. Sick teachers were sometimes given sheltered employment. Recreational facilities and housing were often provided. These fringe benefits were used to attract poorly-paid teachers into the urban classroom by employers unable to offer more salary.

Thus there was a curriculum oecumenicalism, a neutral catholicity of offering and practice which, together with the friendly atmosphere of a small institution appealed to progressive and traditional teachers alike. Nevertheless,

it was the British head teachers who as curriculum influentials and benevolent despots determined the level of support and the official success or ineffectiveness of centres.

In most education authorities the ad hoc use of spare classrooms was used to create teachers centres. Thus centres were rarely located at the best point for travelling teachers; and if travel across the city was time-consuming it could be just as inconvenient for a rural teacher to have to travel miles across countryside after school. Rural authorities, with their smaller education budgets, were spending only half of what urban education authorities did by 1972.

Many teachers centres had a resource function built into their brief. There was an explosion of the learning resources available to teachers; the electric plastic classroom sprang up everywhere. Teachers feverishly bought audio-visual aids and an increasing stream of commercial materials. Teachers needed a place where they could train to use these resources, borrow them or discuss them in curriculum development groups.

The resource function often determined the location and number of teachers centres, as in Australia or New Zealand where a deliberate move towards curriculum and administration devolution began with the setting-up of resource centres. Thus the teachers centre could be a

satellite, an annexe, or the same institution as the resource centre. Sometimes specialist resources were collected together, for primary teachers in reading or in multi cultural curricula, or as in London for secondary specialist teachers. There were relatively few specialist centres by 1977 in Britain except in the large urban authorities.

Some teachers centres, curriculum development, or resource centres provided reprographic services and acted as a small publishing firm, particularly for environmental studies and other local curriculum materials. Occasionally production was on a large scale, as with London's Media Resource Centre, which was more like a conventional publishing house.

Indeed a national publishing house and teachers centre, the Schools Council, was set up and after 1965 soon had funded a hundred or so ongoing curriculum projects. Paid for jointly by the LEAs and government, the Schools Council saw local centres as diffusing and disseminating its products, the retail shop outlet for the wholesale producer. But determined to resist being seen as a central conspiracy to take over curriculum or direct the teacher, and largely controlled by the teacher unions, the Schools Council deliberately avoided the 'hard sell' and its brief anyway excluded inservice activity. However, the role of the

entrepreneurial publisher changed markedly. Local authorities, central curriculum agencies and publishers increasingly collaborated. The publishers lost some editorial control but instead had a guaranteed market rather as in half the U.S. states.

Local government reorganisation between 1964 and 1974 reduced the total number of LEAs to 105, resulted in a contraction in the number of teachers centres but an increase in their influence. The renamed LEAs used the centres to announce their identity. Some centres were rationalised or closed because of education cuts. Thus unlike the U.S. or Australian experience where Federal or private funding was important the British teachers centres from their early history were exclusively controlled by the LEAs.

Yet much was made of the neutrality of the teachers centres where under comprehensive reorganisation Principals could be diplomatically informed at public meetings that their schools would disappear under comprehensive reorganisation or of the new LEAs plans. The professional democracy of centres was much stressed. Teachers, social workers, inspectors and others could rub shoulders without their epaulettes being observed so the theory ran. In Australia, teachers centres actually brought nuns in the 'non state systemic' and teachers in the state schools together for the first time.

Teachers centres did not fit into any firmly perceived hierarchical structure. Wardens were given ill-defined job definitions, and creative freedom only to encourage teachers to attend on a voluntary basis after school. No one in the unions, inspectorate or among administrators saw centres as potentially powerful. So the much-vaunted neutrality often was benign neglect. But centres were increasingly successful. Their power did grow, even without a captive audience and despite the initial shoestring budgets. Characteristically, by 1977 the staffing of the urban teachers centre in London, consisted of some ten people; professional, secretarial, technical and catering. Teachers centres had arrived.

Sometimes, but less often than would be imagined, teachers centre staffs revived the suggestion of the war-time McNair report, that there should be an education centre, a local public forum for educational discussion. But most British professionals remained coldly indifferent. Only in Australia, under the Whitlam administration, was there a remarkable and creative flowering of education centres.

So what are the remaining or new problems or exciting future developments in British teachers centres which possibly relate to the U.S. experience?

After 1974 an economic recession created demands for cuts in public expenditure especially in education the largest spending department. Simultaneously, a major salary award to British teachers brought sudden, overnight staffing stability. 400 teachers recently applied for one rural teaching post and there are 20,000 unemployed teachers. Improved morale, salaries and conditions of work has meant, except where teachers are being 'excessed' and 'bumped', that everyone can settle down to do the job more seriously and creatively. The scene is ripe for curriculum innovation.

Emphasis has diminished on induction activity with young teachers, their recreational, pastoral, housing or social work support. Money need no longer be splashed out by teachers centres in organising weekend courses at seaside hotels to attract young teachers into cities. Rather the problem is to persuade teachers to resign, with the embarassing decline in urban school rolls. There is an ageing teaching force now, with an urban generational gap between those who are around 30 years of age and those in their fifties approaching retirement - something centres can help to mend.

But teachers, and to a much lesser extent teachers centres, are vulnerable to a new mood of public and political hysteria over educational accountability. Encouraged by Her Majesty's Inspectors and the grey mandarins of the Department of Education and Science, pressured by

public, parents and electorate, central government has begun to jog the elbow of local education authorities. Recently 'the Great Debate', a series of public educational conferences organised by the government, has been held throughout the country. There has been muscle-flexing by H.M. Inspectors over modern language teaching and mixed ability. A mysterious Assessment of Performance Unit has been set up. The inspectorate is to return to 'light sampling' inspections of thousands of schools. A Departmental discussion document recently indicated that each LEA will be asked to submit its curriculum. Public calls for increased accountability and intervention in schools, have been highlighted by the 'Tyndale School Enquiry' or the research report of Neville Bennett on 'Informal Classrooms'.

The Education Minister has hinted that the central grant given to British LEAs each year may in future be monitored to see how the inservice element is spent for at present it is lost in the global sum. This would certainly seem likely to expand the activities and strengthen the role of teachers centres. But as some of us predicted a trend towards government or LEA centralism may threaten the teachers centres. Although the game is firmly in the court of the employers, local education authorities, who control the centres there may be a domino effect. Central

government, Whitehall mandarins and HMIs will stay in the background, but they will hold a big stick ready to intervene where LEAs fail to strengthen their control over the teachers, educational standards and curriculum. That impulse will be strengthened shortly by a report from the Taylor Committee which recommends an enlarged role for parents and school managing bodies.

Other consequences follow. If central government checks up on inservice money more will be actually spent on releasing teachers to undertake inservice activity. There will be more day release and the voluntaristic tradition of teachers centres will further decline. Teachers will more often find the content of courses is dictated by their LEA employers, and an appropriate balance between professional judgement and educational accountability will have to be negotiated. The large teams of advisers and inspectors in the reorganising LEAs, at last having a captive force anxious to keep their jobs, have already begun to use their power to confer promotion and approval. They too are under Departmental scrutiny, and therefore their pressure on teachers to teach the 'official' curriculum will sharpen. That is a dramatic change, specially in the urban schools, where inspectors until two years ago were pleading with any teacher just to stay in the classroom.

No one should complain that staffing stability has arrived. Nor should the expansion of inservice release or more sustained inservice courses and curriculum development activity be resented. For there will be less emphasis on crash courses and cargo cult and much more serious interest in curriculum innovation, with a real possibility that something will happen in the classroom to which the teacher returns. There is at last an opportunity for the sophisticated inservice education which must support the 'informal' classroom to be undertaken professionally over a longer time perspective.

Improved teacher supply allowing release at teachers centres is likely to lead to more creditation. There is increased interest in holiday courses. Our experience with the Open University Reading Development Diploma suggests that a combination of classroom realism and academic creditation will be sought. Now an all-graduate profession, British teachers will emphasise professional qualifications - if only for promotion purposes. But teachers centre staffs will frequently encounter more teachers too long in their schools, who see no promotion or reward for changing their viewpoint, and are perhaps unwilling candidates for 'recycling' or curriculum development drafted into the teachers centre by the inspectors. For while the likelihood of classroom implementation is a bonus, it is also professionally a threat. Advisers and inspectorate who have released the teacher for a

course or 'invited her' to attend will expect to see classroom results. Indeed with government emphasis on each LEA producing a common core curriculum it is more likely that teachers seconded to do curriculum development in teachers centres will be engaged in producing the officially sponsored curriculum having less professional freedom than hitherto.

Curiously enough, in Australia and New Zealand, there has been a converse pattern. A sharp move away from curriculum dictat by the Department and inspectorate in both countries has been accompanied by moves towards open education. As in the U.S. it has been found that implicit in the ideology of informal primary education is an assumption that the teacher should make or chose her own curriculum at a teachers centre.

There are therefore danger signs in the British setting. A counter-reformation, officially approved, may swing too far in the wrong direction and destroy the best of the informal education tradition. It would be ironical if this happened just at the time when staffing stability has come to the schools. Many of us have argued against excessive curriculum innovation during a period of urban school crisis. For those of us who believe it is now possible to resume the trend towards effective informal classrooms, a more sophisticated and exacting kind of teaching, it is particularly regrettable to see a backlash.

Teachers are under attack. Everyone conveniently forgets that many poorly-qualified and unwilling recruits entered teaching in the 1960s during the urban classroom crisis. The unions which remained indifferent or neutral to the early growth of teachers centres have sharply altered their stance. They now see teachers centres as vital professional agencies. Professionally teachers can best defend themselves from attack on their performance by raising standards through inservice courses. Every teacher released for inservice education will benefit teacher employment in general. In the climate of a Tyndale scandal, the teachers must defend themselves and the release of teachers to centres is something the unions must strenuously support. Teacher unions are far less active on another crucial issue. With increasing emphasis on cost effectiveness, it becomes difficult to argue that teachers should be paid to lead inservice courses or workshops. Cost-cutting pressures to use the inservice advisers or inspectors could mean that teachers will be progressively disenfranchised from leadership of their own professional inservice education.

The role of the college of education has changed. Teacher graduates now train in liberal arts colleges, not in monotechnic teacher-training institutions. But with changing demographic trends and staffing stability the demand for new teachers has come to an abrupt end.

Training places were drastically cut back and the colleges have looked instead for an expansion in their inservice role. Two new journals specialising in inservice education have been launched in recent years: the British Journal of Teacher Education and the British Journal of Inservice Education.

But the inservice ambitions of the colleges have been frustrated. Proposals advanced in the 1973 James Report for a massive programme of probationer support and a sabbatical term every seven years for the experienced teacher ran short of money. Indeed education authorities have been cutting back on the release of teachers to one year courses at colleges. In effect this has meant more money and teachers going to the teachers centres which are after all controlled by the LEAs. LEAs which do run their own colleges of education are therefore considering deploying lecturers to work in the schools on inservice support. The new role of the teachers centres in working with lecturing staff in the schools is an exciting point of development.

But the neutrality of the teachers centre is certainly threatened. Teachers centres fully-funded and professionally controlled by the LEAs already lack the voluntaristic tradition and the independent funding which

have been a feature of the U.S. experience. Nor is there dual provision, from the Federal government and state which would allow them to divide and rule. If teachers centres had been located in colleges 'academic independence' might have defended them from the worst excesses of popular dementia over educational accountability. Some of us wish that teachers centre staffs had built better bridges with the colleges and universities.

Where migration from the cities has caused school rolls to decline and created empty classrooms, future teachers centres will be converted from spare accommodation in existing schools. Some larger, perhaps specialist centres will be closed and their staffs redeployed. The emphasis will be on the small accessible multi purpose unit. There may be a long term future for the staff college, as developed at Liverpool or Manchester, with a warden on top principal's salary and professional team of several dozen people but current LEA budgets do not encourage it.

There is too a growing emphasis on <u>school-based</u> staff development. Sociologically, the urban school has entered a period of consolidation: the gang is all here. Schools are fully staffed, except for a few specialist teachers, but are suffering the aftermath of years of educational neglect and urban stress. There is a natural tendency while settling down to argue for the school as a teachers

centre, for school-based inservice and curriculum development programmes. But although admittedly it is in the school that it all finally happens, there is a danger with excessive stability of professional insularity. Already we have a cottage industry of worksheet production with nearby secondary schools producing identical artefacts. So the teachers centre has an important job as an information and resource agency linking networks of primary and secondary teachers.

Indeed the networking principle is crucial. Teachers centre leaders are like spymasters. They know each self contained reference group, the nursery teachers, the modern languages specialists, the principals. But those groups don't know each other. Little may be beautiful. It stimulates the contagious enthusiasm and professional cohesion essential for curriculum development. But professional insularity is a possible risk.

Teachers and curriculum development centres in Britain have invariably functioned as resource centres. In Australia and New Zealand, similarly, the growth of centres has been linked with resource provision plus curriculum and administrative devolution. Starting as a resource centre, the question does arise: should the teachers centre be a satellite to the main resource centre? Or should each teachers centre operate as a resource centre?

In widely dispersed geographical terrain, in Wales, New South Wales, or possibly in the U.S., you may need a media mobile that can travel around. You may have a scatter of annexes, resource workshops and teachers centre rooms distributed across a city or rural state. But as Australian teachers complain, the last thing you want in a small country town is a teachers centre where teachers meet teachers. Social life can be already too narrow. But with the continuing growth of educational technology and proliferation of new multi media learning resources the resource function will continue to be important for teachers centres. Indeed, the purchasing consortium which obtains learning resources at special discount for member schools is often sponsored by the teachers centre.

In any teachers centre or resource centre the para professional is a key figure. As Waller observed fifty years ago, the janitor has power. Equally the secretary, the caterer, the audio visual aids expert are para professionals who ,carefully recruited and trained in small group life, can help to endorse the teachers centre style and image. But if the wrong person is appointed or given the wrong job to do, things go strangely awry. In one Australian centre which shared a building with the film library, teachers were not allowed to preview the films because of the rigid schedule for rewinding and despatch operated by minor bureaucrats.

But British teachers centres have found an important role in supporting para professionals who work within the schools. A flotilla of ladies in nylon overalls, teacher aides appointed following the Plowden Report to help in the playground and the classroom have been improving their skills at teachers centres.

But will British teachers centres in the future welcome others besides the teachers or para professionals? Or will the teachers centre in Britain remain a monotechnic dinosaur? Despite much lip-service initial and inservice teacher education are still not integrated. Students don't use teachers centres and meet experienced colleagues in the way they should. Many of us would also like to see more social workers and allied professionals working with teachers through the centres. But most of all we would like to see the role of the teachers centre expanded as media resource agency, exhibition place, education shop and community education forum for parents and public. If the Taylor Committee in Britain shortly recommends, as seems likely, that parental representation on governing bodies should be expanded there will be a major new task. At a time of economic stringency and public unease over education, the expertise, materials and equipment in teachers centres represent a community education resource which should be more widely accessible. Teachers centres would also

benefit by having some parent or public representative on their managing bodies. But sadly international experience so far suggests that a narrow professional role for teachers centres is inevitably pursued unless some specific rubric is laid down - as happened with the thirty Australian education centres set up by the Karmel Report of 1973. In that experiment it was possible to see a purist reflection of the British ideology, this was so rarely achieved but so much written about: the teachers centre as 'neutral' ground for public and professionals alike. I was ashamed to see in 1975 in Wagga Wagga, a town which is a British joke for Australian provinciality, an education shop and teachers centre in the high street arcade which put the British achievement in the shade. My chagrin was all the more complete upon learning that the innovation had been prompted by British ideas. Not that education centres have been without problems. A fear early on was that the Australian Federal Government would try to offer an alternative curriculum through the education centres, taking advantage of their diplomatic immunity. For the method of funding had created 'federal cuckoos in the state nests'. Funding was given only if there was parent and community, as well as teacher representation, on any management committee seeking to start a centre. Each education centre committee also had to undertake to buy its own building with part of the capital grant. Thus the state piper could not call the

inservice tune, or control the rehearsal, even if he owned the auditorium where the teacher eventually performed. But in Britain, New Zealand or parts of Australia, teachers have been reluctant to pursue the education centre experiment. Teachers have seen centres as having immense professional importance for them and have not wished to see others involved. Yet over-emphasis on professionalism could be counter-productive. When teachers are under fire, surely it is a good idea to have a public forum for informed discussion instead of uninformed controversy. Anyway, the philosophy of informal education logically demands that any teachers centre dedicated to that tradition must involve teachers and parents.

So what is the future role of the teachers centre leader? He has undergone increased professionalisation. The British teacher unions have put the case at the Burnham Committee for a special scale, which would absorb wardens into the national negotiating structure. Most wardens are paid on a teachers or head teachers scale at present. Salary levels would be assessed on the geography of the area covered or the number of teachers served.

Teachers centre leaders have developed local, regional, and national organisations. At first they met regionally in groups with strange names like WISE (Wardens in the South East). Three years ago a national organisation,

the National Conference of Teachers Centre Leaders was set up. Teacher unionists then made a sharp demarcation between the professional and the union role of the warden. Sharp debate arose over whether teachers centre leaders should join regional groups which would then federate to a national organisation; or whether individual membership of the national organisation should be allowed. A dual system was agreed upon. Since then the national organisation has achieved a place at the table when inservice policies are being reviewed as is the case at the present time.

What about wardens individually? Some have found their tasks circumscribed by advisers or inspectors. The multi purpose warden has sometimes been told 'leave my subject alone, I'll see to that.' 'You mind the tea urn and make sure the overhead projector is working.' Wardens sometimes complain that their role as talent spotter, impresario or employer of teachers has been eroded by education cuts.

But many teachers centre leaders have become slotted into the educational hierarchy and are even seen as one of its pawns. After all the LEAs who pay the education bill are politically sensitive to the new emphasis on accountability, are looking to the teachers centres to improve classroom performance. Again, some wardens have become

superior bureaucrats, administrators or caterers and have abandoned their identification with working teachers. Wardens generally are an ageing population of considerable occupational stability. Promotion opportunities have dried up. So where do wardens go? Earlier they went to heads of large schools or inspectors. There are no college of education posts and those which are available have precarious tenure. Yet wardens themselves, when consulted in a survey in 1972, advised that the job should be a secondment for a limited number of years.

The exhilaration has sometimes gone. The charismatic phase curdles into bureaucracy. With their intelligence networks assembled, their curriculum innovation falling into routine, teachers centre wardens can become dull people. The elation of originating something new, that district diary of school events, or getting a swimming pool open for teachers in the evening, has become an administrative chore. Teachers irately telephone to complain that the swimming pool is not open as of right, or the diary has not been automatically advertised. So they should complain. But wardens do sometimes feel like the sorcerer's apprentice, having unleashed such an immense volume of work upon themselves.

Nevertheless as the new professionals they have accumulated power, status and influence, together with very good salaries in the urban centres. Occasionally the

primary principal approaches the warden nowadays and asks him when he is likely to be vacating his post. That never used to happen. You can be optimistic about the role of the future British teachers centre leader. For if the subject inspectors are elbowing him sideways while they compete with each other for influence, he will continue taking an overall view of the whole curriculum, the whole school and the complete classroom. He will still need to mediate, co-ordinate and act as impresario. For teachers centre leaders do innovate and not just respond to demand. That neutrality is not passive and the wardens role should be innovative and possess creative tension even while he holds the ring, carefully refereeing the various pressure groups, unions, inspectors, head teachers and class teachers who are in competition. But certainly the great reward is being like Dr. Johnson's Rasselas. You can hang up there in a balloon, seeing the whole picture, zooming now and then into a warm, status-free relationship, with the individual teacher, parents or children in the classroom.

R.E.T.
May, 1977.

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